



It's not the economy, stupid! Explaining the electoral success of the German right-wing populist AfD

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Abstract

Right-wing populism is on the rise. Everywhere? Until recently, the resilience of the German party system to such a party has been an exception to this general trend. The establishment of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in the wake of the Eurozone crisis put an end to this German *exceptionalism*. This paper tests the ‘losers of modernization’-thesis, one of the most dominant explanations for right-wing populist voting, for the case of the AfD. Based on district level data from the *Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development* and official data on electoral outcomes, we examine whether the socio-economic characteristics of a district yield any explanatory power for the AfD’s electoral success in the federal elections of 2013 and the elections to the European Parliament in 2014. With this data, we avoid problems of representativeness and reliability of survey data with respect to socio-economically marginalized groups and their voting behavior. Our findings suggest that the modernization thesis bears little relevance for the success of the populist right in Germany. By contrast, we find a strong correlation between the AfD’s electoral success and the success of radical right parties in previous elections in the same district. We explain this intriguing finding with a “tradition of radical right voting” and a specific political culture on which the AfD has been able to draw once the broader political and social context allowed for the creation of a right-wing populist party in Germany.

Introduction

With the electoral success of the Austrian FPÖ, the Dutch VVP, the French Front National, the Swiss SVP, the Sweden Democrats, and the True Finns amongst others, European right-wing populism has become the most extensively analyzed party phenomenon in recent political science scholarship (Mudde, 2016). It is therefore not surprising that the recent entry of a right-wing populist party to various German state parliaments (although the party narrowly missed the legal five-percent threshold in the last federal elections of 2013) attracted substantial scholarly attention, even more so since the right wing populist party has emerged with a considerable delay compared to the party systems of its European neighbors (see Bornschier, 2012; Arzheimer, 2015).¹ Studies about the electorate of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), the Alternative for Germany, proliferate (Goerres et al., 2017; Berbuir et al., 2015; Schmitt-Beck, 2014; Frank, 2015). Yet, a thorough analysis is still hindered by few observations, problems of reliability and representativeness of survey data, and from the fact that few data sets combine detailed socio-economic information with information on political attitudes and/or electoral behavior (De Vries and Hoffmann, 2016). Studies that rely on qualitative interviews come with their own methodological problems (Michelsen et al., 2017). In this paper, we investigate into the determinants of electoral support for the Populist Radical Right (PRR) in Germany with the help of a data set that avoid the shortfalls of previous studies.

We want to test the ‘loser of modernization’-framework that figures so prominently in the literature on right wing-populism (Mudde, 2007b; Betz, 1994; Betz, 1998) for the case of the German AfD. The ‘loser of modernization’-framework identifies those that suffer from recent economic change, for instance the unskilled and low-skilled (manual) workers, as the electoral group from which populist parties draw their main support. This is either understood in a direct sense as an economic protest vote of those disadvantaged by economic structural change due to globalization, tertiarization or digitalization, or in an indirect sense, namely that the economically disadvantaged strata of the society are more likely to hold exactly those political attitudes that parties of the new populist right primarily address (Kitschelt, 2007). However, the fact that the rise of the AfD parallels the spectacular revival of the German economy after the shock of the Great Recession in 2008/09, and that the party initially had

¹ The party is today represented in 13 of 16 state parliaments in Germany.

rather voiced an upper-middle class protest against the Euro nurtures some skepticism as to how applicable the ‘losers of modernization’ explanation really is in this case.

Specifically, we ask whether deprivation explains the electoral success of right-wing populism in Germany. We use a broad concept of deprivation. Unemployment or low income alone might not be ideal indicators for the various other dimensions of being ‘left behind’: unhealthy life-styles, high and persistent unemployment, poor public infrastructure, unsafe neighborhoods. Moreover, income inequality as a relative concept might also say little about ‘real’ need. Narrowing in on unemployment or income therefore does not full justice to the complex nature of social and economic deprivation and might be insufficient as an explanation when it comes to the question of who votes for populist parties. Our main independent variable is therefore an encompassing concept of economic and social deprivation that captures the multidimensionality of the phenomenon, namely an index that comprises many other measures beyond income.

As a database, we use the Regional Indicators dataset (INKAR) of the *Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development* (Raumforschung, 2016) and merge it with official data on the electoral success of the AfD in administrative districts (*Kreis* or *kreisfreie Stadt*). To the best of our knowledge, this dataset has not been used in this literature so far. We trade the disadvantage of aggregation, i.e. the methodological problem of a potential ecologic fallacy, against the disadvantage of either simply lacking the adequate data or of serious problems of non-reliability and non-representativeness of existing surveys. The problem of under-representation is particularly sensitive in our context as we are interested in the political behavior of marginalized group of voters, who tend to be marginalized in survey data as well. And we are interested in the party choice for an extreme party, which – like vote abstention – tends to be substantially under-reported in survey data, too. We take this as a strong argument in favor of using hard evidence with respect to electoral behavior, namely official election results, and of combining these with detailed information about the socio-economic structure in a given district.

To preview our main result: first, we find no evidence in support for the ‘losers of modernization’-hypothesis. Economic deprivation does *not* predict a right-populist vote. But if it is not socio-economic conditions, what then drives support for the AfD? Our data indicates, second, the propensity of certain electoral milieus to cast a right-populist vote, as

we can show that the districts with a high share of a radical right votes in the 1990s are also the districts with a high share of votes for the AfD around 20 years later. But these are not milieus of economically or otherwise disadvantaged. Can we further narrow in on these milieus? The literature often suggests that a divide still separates the Western and Eastern parts of united Germany with respect to political culture, electoral stability, trust in democratic institutions etc. We therefore, thirdly, test whether this divide might explain a fair share in the regional variance of the AfD's electoral success. We do find evidence for a stronger support of the PRR in the East, and here we see especially the interaction between economic deprivation and rightist milieus. But we also identify a strong internal heterogeneity of the East and the West with respect to AfD-support, since electoral milieus responsive to the ideological offer of the populist right are especially located in the relatively prosperous South of both the old and the new *Länder*, i.e. in Baden-Wurttemberg and Bavaria on the one hand, and Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt, on the other.

The paper is organized as follows. We first give a brief overview over the research on right-wing populism and its prominent 'losers of modernization'-explanation and derive our hypotheses. We then describe our data and run a number of tests on our hypotheses. The final section concludes and speculates about the importance of our findings for the upcoming federal elections.

Theoretical framework

Right-wing populism is not a new phenomenon. The phenomenon as such received its label from the US-American Populist or People's Party, founded in 1892, articulating mainly farmers' protest against the increasing costs of railway transportation, against tariffs that were perceived to be tailored exclusively to industry's interests, and against restrictive monetary policy, i.e. the gold-standard (Goodwyn, 1976). Already then populism took a pronounced anti-migration stance and invoked a sharp 'we versus them'-rhetoric, in which the pious and upright countryside was pitted against a corrupt, decadent, urban East-coast elite, i.e. against Boston and New York bank(st)ers and Washington politicians.

That economically marginalized or otherwise endangered groups feed populist movements with a strong dose of anti-elite rhetoric was an explanation also applied to the McCarthy-

populism of the 1950s. McCarthyism as a right-wing hysterical movement paradoxically fell in a times in which the US-society and -economy seemed to be in their apex. To explain the advent of this populist movement in times of high growth and full employment, of general social upward mobility and international dominance of the *American Way of Life* prompted a proponent of modernization theory like Seymour Martin Lipset, for whom liberal democracy and economic well-being were intimately linked, to invoke the intolerance of the working class and their feeling of status anxiety: “The support which a large section of the American working class gives to right-wing extremism today may also be related to the greater sense of status deprivation felt by ‘failures’ in periods of prosperity” (Lipset, 1955: 283). A lack of social capital necessary to cope with rapid social change, authoritarian character traits, and a feeling not of falling behind, but of others closing up from behind – these were the elements in Lipset’s explanation for a populist outburst in times of unprecedented economic well-being.

In more recent contributions to the literature on right-wing populism we find explanations very similar to those proposed earlier: structural economic change, increased competitive pressures due to economic openness or to massive immigration, and profound social transformations (including fundamental value change) produce ‘losers of modernization’ or those who anticipate to belong to this group in the near future (Betz, 1994; Swank and Betz, 2003; Kriesi et al., 2008; Mudde, 2007a; Mudde, 2016). These *Modernisierungsverlierer* seek refuge in parties or political movements that promise to ‘take back control’, reduce immigration and restrict welfare entitlements to those of national citizenship. In essence, these explanations resemble strongly those proposed already in the 1960s. Could one easily date the following quotation: “Today the politics of the radical right is the politics of frustration – the sour impotence of those who find themselves unable to understand, let alone command, the complex mass society that is our polity today”? In fact, it is by Daniel Bell and was formulated in 1964 (Mudde, 2010), but easily could have been formulated today in one of the op-eds on the success of the Front National or the Brexit. Those excluded, marginalized, in precarious jobs or unemployed, who lack the requisite ‘social capital’ to respond adequately to social and economic change (Betz, 1998) are said to compromise the electoral milieu in which right-wing populism can prosper. As Cas Mudde recently stated in his retrospective on three waves of research on the populist radical right: “the growth in the scope of the study of the populist radical right has been accompanied by little theoretical innovation since the early 1990s (or, really, the 1960s)” (Mudde, 2016: 8). The “predominant theoretical framework is

still the modernization thesis”, in our context therefore the ‘losers of modernization’-explanation.

But if modernization creates these losers in bust- as well as in boom-times, it seems hard to test for the economic factors that play such a central role in the attempts to explain the success of populist radical right. The modernization framework appears as an ‘all weather’-explanation which either points to real economic hardship causing resentment or which – for prosperous times – emphasizes a subjective feeling of ‘relative loss’ if a certain group has not benefitted as much from economic growth as others: “Hard times mobilize economic group antagonisms, prosperity liberates the public for the expression of its more luxurious hostilities” (Hofstadter, 1962: 83). Somehow, populism always seems to fit and benefit: In times of recession we see distributive conflict fueling bitterness, in times of prosperity we see status-anxiety and battles over status-preservation. But both for good as well as bad times, these early explanations within the frame of modernization theory pointed to the working class and the lower middle-class as the main social culprits, responsible for populist responses to the challenges of modernity. This is not to say that it does not make sense to look at the political and electoral fallout of the Great Recession (Funke et al., 2015; Lindvall, 2014; Kriesi, 2012). However, Germany’s quick and quite spectacular economic recovery after 2008/9 and the parallel rise of the AfD as a party that at least initially reacted rather to the German fiscal obligations in the Greek malaise than to a German malaise rises doubts as to how persuasive such an explanatory link from economics to elections would be.

Of course, the literature has not only highlighted individual propensities to vote for the extreme right, but also the context on the macro-level – for instance high unemployment (Jackman and Volpert, 1996; Golder, 2003a; Arzheimer, 2009) or a lack of social compensation against the risks of economic globalization (Swank and Betz, 2003). In a comparative perspective structural factors like effective and/or legal electoral thresholds, which hinder or facilitate the entry of new parties, then of course also play a role. Strategies of the established parties and “collusion politics” (Bornschieer, 2012; Bale, 2003; Meguid, 2005) or electoral institutions (Golder, 2003b: but see; Carter, 2004) shape the success of right-wing populist parties as well, in particular at the initial entry phase. And we see more complex explanations, for instance those identifying a ‘latent’ reservoir of authoritarian and anti-liberal attitudes that are triggered in times of crisis and/or by skillful political entrepreneurs (Scheuch and Klingemann, 1967). The main issue of contention remains then whether these

authoritarian attitudes represent a ‘normal pathology’ or a ‘pathological normalcy’ (Mudde, 2010), i.e. how widespread and commonly shared these attitudes are. In the center of these explanations still are those hit by unfavorable economic circumstances or ‘at risk’ to be hit by them, who then activate these latent sentiments or whose sentiments get activated by the new populist right. Such modified versions of the modernization framework suggest that we should be able to find, even if somehow blurred through *anticipation* instead of *realization* of economic setbacks, socio-economic correlates of right-wing populism. And that we should find those among the somehow deprived and disadvantaged or endangered.

Approaches emphasizing the supply- rather than the demand-side lead to similar expectations, since the new populist parties seem to target primarily those vulnerable socio-economic groups that figure prominently also in the demand-driven explanations for right-wing populism (Mudde, 2010), the working class and the lower middle-class or petite bourgeoisie. These classes are said to hold the anti-migration and nationalist attitudes that are associated with support for PRR-parties (Bornschieer, 2012; Oesch, 2008; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007). The two groups’ profoundly different preferences with respect to socio-economic policies (more redistribution and state regulation the first, lower taxes and less state regulation the second) might explain the fact that the populist radical right mobilizes “primarily along the value/identity dimension and not so much on the socio-economic dimension of electoral politics” (Röth et al., 2017; Rovny, 2013). The clear demarcated socio-economic carrier groups of the new right populism remain nevertheless the same. We therefore ask whether ‘deprivation’ in its multi-faceted character in any way correlates with the recent electoral success of Germany’s new populist right party, the AfD.

Alternatively, one could expect that electoral success is not due to socio-economic, but due to *socio-cultural factors*: In this perspective, support for the Populist Radical Right is driven by specific values and attitudes, such as rejection of multiculturalism and immigration, a high esteem for traditional values and a regard for the national identity as well as a general dissatisfaction with the political system (Bornschieer, 2010; Knigge, 1998; Lubbers et al., 2002). Such socio-cultural attitudes need not be directly and exclusively ‘derived’ from unfavorable economic conditions (see for instance Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014) but might represent an explanatory factor in its own right, rooted in different political cultures.

But can the AfD draw upon a certain right-leaning electoral milieu? The lack of a nationally established populist right party in Germany has been puzzling for researchers since

Bornschier (2010); Bornschier (2012) and Kriesi et al. (2008) have shown the existence of an electorate with anti-universalists, anti-immigration and exclusionists attitudes susceptible to a populist right mobilization that share specific socio-economic commonalities, just as in other advanced industrialized democracies. However, internal divisions within the radical right, the historical taboo of right extremism and the strategies of the established parties have prevented the success of a populist right party so far with the partial and short-lived exception of the *Republikaner* in some states in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Bornschier, 2012; Jaschke, 1999; Art, 2006; Arzheimer, 2015). Nevertheless, the AfD might draw on the same milieus as these unsuccessful predecessors.

From the above we formulate two hypotheses:

(H1) The more disadvantaged a district, the higher the vote share of the populist right in this district.

(H2) The stronger the support for radical right parties traditionally has been in a district, the higher the vote share of the populist right in this district today.

Most studies on German politics assume differences in political attitudes between the Eastern and Western part of Germany, due to differences in political socialization in the four decades of a divided nation, and due to the lesser degree to which an initially Western party system has been entrenched in the East. The Eastern German party system has been consolidated only recently and differs from its Western complement, for instance, by the strong position of the populist-left *Die Linke* which represented “the main party of the left” in Eastern Germany in the last two parliamentary elections. One therefore could plausibly assume, for example, that a lower degree of party identification leads to a higher propensity to cast a protest vote, which then might benefit an extreme party like the AfD. We therefore test a third hypothesis:

(H3) The AfD finds more electoral support in the new German states.

We now turn to the empirical analysis.

Data and approach

The evidence we present is based on two data sources: first, administrative data² provide us with a unique range of socio-economic indicators at the district level.³ We match these data, secondly, with official election outcomes from the 2013 federal election, provided by the regional statistical offices. In the federal elections in the fall of 2013 the newly founded AfD gained 4.7 percent of all votes, and very narrowly missed the legal five-percent threshold to enter the national parliament. To inquire whether today's support for the AfD draws upon previous electoral support for parties of the radical right, we add the results from the elections to the European Parliament (EP) in 1995, 1999 and 2014. Combined this provides us with a uniquely rich data set, with a sufficiently large number of observations for the dependent variable as well as very detailed information on our theoretical concept of interest, namely deprivation. Our data allows us to compare recent election outcomes with much earlier election results in the 1990s as another improvement over previous analyses (cf. Frank, 2015). But why do we not make use of individual data like those provided by the *Sozio-ökonomisches Panel* (SOEP), the German panel study with detailed information on the socio-economic background of the respondents? This is mainly out of two reasons: first, with respect to socially and economically marginalized groups the representativeness of survey data even of such as the SOEP is in question. Given that those at the 'fringes of society' are also systematically less likely to participate in such an encompassing and annually repeated survey, we have to fear substantial underreporting of exactly those groups that interest us most (Selb and Munzert, 2013; Caballero, 2005; Tourangeau et al., 2010). Second, the reliability of SOEP's data on political behavior is very much in question, too. Participation in elections is systematically over-reported even in electoral surveys, let alone in other individual level surveys. The same holds for the voting for extreme parties. In fact, SOEP does not even contain information about the 'last vote', but only asks for 'closeness to party', which can mean many things when it comes to actual voting behavior. In contrast, our data provide 'hard' information both with respect to our dependent variable and our independent variables. This, in our view, trumps the 'ecological fallacy' drawback that comes with the use of aggregated data. With INKAR's more than 400 observations per year, the ecological problem seems less severe anyway.

² Indikatoren und Karten zur Raumentwicklung (<http://www.bbsr.bund.de>)

³ The data refers to 2012.

Additionally, our data has particular advantages also with respect to our main explanatory variable, namely deprivation. To assess the importance of socio-economic conditions for radical electoral behavior we want to go beyond simply looking at unemployment or average income as indicators of disadvantage but to consider a broader dimension of economic and social deprivation. We make use of the rich information on socio-economic conditions at the district level that INKAR provides, from which we create an index of deprivation. The following indicators go into the principal component factor analysis, all on the district level: share of unemployment, share of unemployed below the age of 25, share of those above the age of 55 among the unemployed, share of long-term unemployed, employment rate, average household income, share of births given by teenage mothers on all births, share of those who leave school with high-school degree, squared household size, remaining life expectancy at the age of 60 years, share of under-employed, ‘mini-jobs’ as share of all employment, old-age poverty measured as the share of old age pensioners that have to rely on supplementary benefits from the state, average age when entering retirement, child poverty measured as the share of children that have to rely on supplementary benefits from the state, share of those in private insolvency, share of those on welfare or unemployment support, single mothers on welfare, single mothers below 25 years old on welfare, extent of welfare transfers, distance to next hospital, short-term and long-term labor market support.

The resulting first factor is our indicator of economic deprivation (see Appendix A for more information on the factor analysis). For the sake of brevity, we refer to the indicator as *index of deprivation*. The index of deprivation correlates strongly but not perfectly with unemployment or average household-income (see Table 1). In particular the less than perfect correlation with average household income reflects that other factors than income play a role in economic and social deprivation.

Correlation with deprivation	Unemployment	Average household income
Germany	0.945	-0.593
West Germany	0.935	-0.434
East Germany	0.925	-0.445

Table 1: Correlation between index of deprivation, unemployment and household income

Figure 1 shows the regional distribution of the AfD’s vote share in the federal elections in 2013 as our main dependent variable. It shows that the party’s support is by no means

exclusively found in the Eastern part of Germany. Rather, there seems to be a North-South divide which overlays the former East-West division. The AfD gained substantial support in the South of the old *Bundesrepublik* and the South of the new *Bundesländer*, as the dark pattern in Saxony and Baden-Wurttemberg as well as Bavaria show, whereas it fared less well in the North of West Germany as well as in the Western districts of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

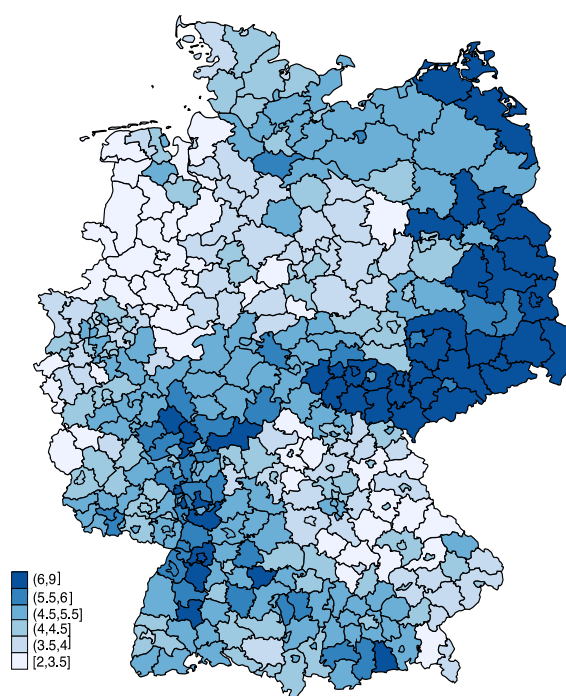


Figure 1: Regional distribution of the AfD vote share in the federal elections in 2013

Figure 2 shows the distribution of our index of deprivation, the left panel displays the geographical distribution and the right panel displays the statistical distribution of our index. The map of deprivation reveals systematic variation both in the East/West and North/South dimension. In 2013, the disadvantaged are most strongly clustered in the cities of the Ruhr-area (Hamm, Herne, Duisburg, Essen, Recklinghausen or Gelsenkirchen which has the highest score), in the Northwest and in the East of Germany (such as Bremen, Bremerhaven, Wilhelmshaven, Magdeburg, Halle or Leipzig) struggling with de-industrialization as well as the rural areas in the North-Eastern part of Germany (for example Uckermark, Vorpommern-Greifswald, Burgenland, Salzlandkreis). The South of Germany, by contrast, knows little social and economic deprivation as the light shades of the Southern districts show. In particular Bayern is prosperous. From the 20 districts with the lowest level of deprivation, 19

are to be found in Bayern but levels of deprivation are low in Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Wurttemberg as well.

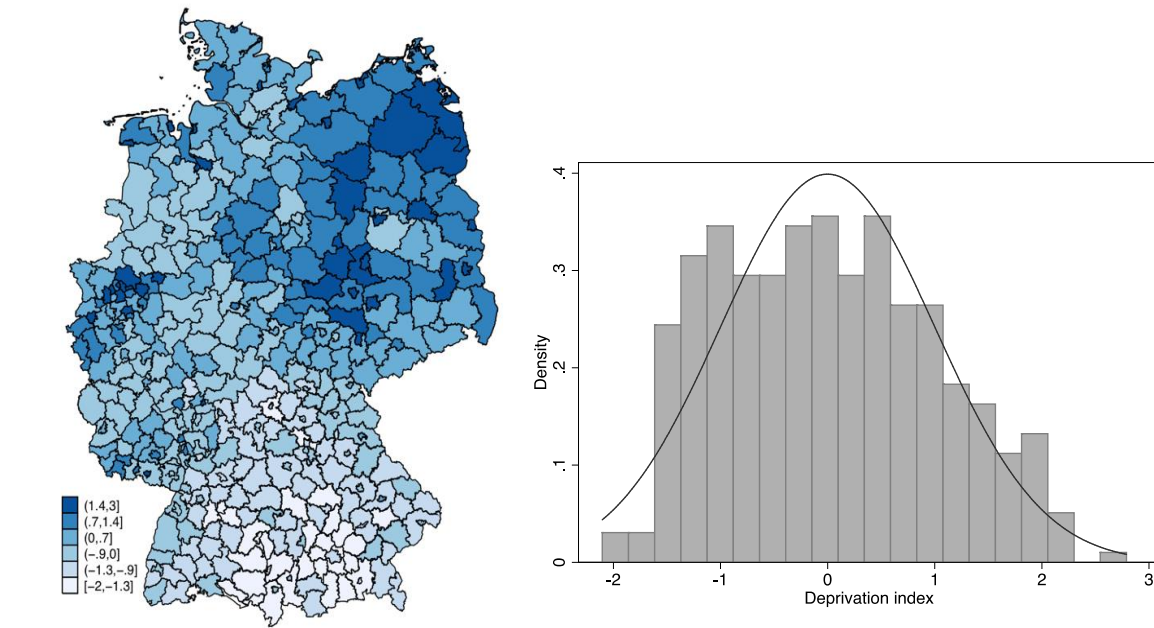


Figure 2: Distribution of index of deprivation (2012)

Whether a populist vote choice and socio-economic deprivation go together, and if so how is analyzed in the following. We examine the relationship between the vote share of the AfD in parliamentary elections of 2013 in administrative districts (*Kreis* or *kreisfreie Stadt*) and their level of deprivation with OLS regressions, controlling for the clustered data structured with state clustered state errors. We further control for the urbanity of the district since populist parties tend to gain less votes in urban districts, and we control for the share of foreigners which might affect the vote share of the AfD as well (Arzheimer, 2009; Golder, 2003a; Swank and Betz, 2003; Lubbers et al., 2002).

Results

To start with the clearest and most striking finding: In contrast to the dominant ‘losers of modernization’-explanation, we do not find any political economy explanation to the success of the AfD. The results in Table 2 provide no evidence in support of this thesis. The first model (M1) shows the simple effect of deprivation on the electoral success of the AfD in the federal elections of 2013 and finds a slightly *negative* and insignificant effect. There is no evidence that the AfD achieves higher gains in disadvantaged districts in the Eastern nor

Western part of Germany (M2) which leads us to reject H1. This finding also holds when analyzing the elections to the European Parliament in 2014 in which the populist right in Germany achieved its electoral breakthrough (see Appendix B).

As to the control variables: The AfD achieves higher vote shares in the Eastern part of Germany as the estimate for the Eastern Germany dummy evidences – we will come back to this finding when discussing hypothesis H3. With a higher share of foreigners and in rural districts, the vote share of the AfD increases as well.

	M1	M2
Index Deprivation	-0.062 (0.11)	-0.012 (0.11)
Eastern Germany	1.957*** (0.41)	2.398*** (0.40)
Urban district	-0.585** (0.21)	-0.607** (0.21)
Share of foreigners	0.105*** (0.02)	0.106*** (0.02)
Deprivation*East Germany		-0.470 (0.40)
Constant	3.666*** (0.22)	3.681*** (0.22)
R2	0.313	0.325
N	402	402

*Notes: Values in parentheses are standard errors. OLS regressions with state clustered standard errors; *significant at the 0.1 level, **significant at the 0.05 level, ***significant at the 0.01 level.*

Table 2: Modernization hypothesis (H1): Estimates for AfD vote share in the federal elections of 2013

We tested variants of the “loser of modernization”-argument (those results can be found in Appendix C): First, we re-ran the analysis with individual components of the deprivation index. These individual components as the unemployment rate or the average household income for instance do not influence the vote share of the AfD either. Second, we considered the social and economic aspect of deprivation separately. One of the strengths of our index is that it captures not only purely economic disadvantages but includes indicators of social disadvantages such as poor public services or an adverse demographic structure as well. Perhaps the social aspects of deprivation are more important than the strictly economic ones. We therefore constructed two sub-indexes, one capturing the state of public services and one capturing the demographic structure. We also tested whether the AfD prospers in districts with a decline in the population or a decline in the younger population as indicators of subjective pitiable economic conditions. Neither indicator suggests an effect on the success of

the AfD. Similarly, we examined whether the effect of economic hardship might be non-linear, based on the idea that those who are afraid of losing might vote for the radical right rather than those who already find themselves on the losing side (individual level data suggests this, see Rovny and Rovny, 2017). Again, we did not find a significant effect of the squared index of deprivation.

Third, it has been argued that it is not economic hardship that drives support for radical parties but economic insecurity, that is fear of job loss (Swank and Betz, 2003). We therefore tested the effect of de-industrialization (loss in industrial employment over 2 and 5 years) and unemployment shocks (unemployment change of 2 and 5 years) on the success of the AfD without finding any significant effect in Eastern nor Western Germany.

If there is no political economy explanation for the electoral success of the AfD, what then might drive support for the party? As argued above, the determinants might not be *socio-economic*, but *socio-cultural*, that is due to specific political milieus where support for radical right ideology thrives (H2). Examining political cultures or social milieus is difficult in particular without data on attitudes and political values. As a proxy, we therefore examine whether the success of the AfD in 2013 is related to a tradition of radical right voting, measured by the success of radical right parties such as the *Nationaldemokratische Partei (NDP)*, *Deutsche Volksunion (DVU)* or *Die Republikaner (REP)* in previous elections. We use data from the elections to the European Parliament, here the EP-elections in 1999 (see Table 3), a second order election with a higher share of radical right voters. That allows us to identify the electoral milieus we are interested in.

	M1	M2	M3
Index Deprivation	0.180* (0.09)	0.111 (0.10)	-0.386 (0.25)
Eastern Germany	1.416*** (0.38)	-0.597 (0.93)	1.209*** (0.40)
Urban district	-0.604*** (0.19)	-0.482** (0.22)	-0.502** (0.19)
Share of foreigners	0.075*** (0.02)	0.079*** (0.02)	0.070*** (0.02)
Radical Right in '99	0.286*** (0.09)	0.213** (0.09)	0.374*** (0.09)
Radical right in '99*East Germany		0.771** (0.27)	
Radical right in '99*Deprivation			0.217** (0.07)
Constant	3.259*** (0.25)	3.365*** (0.27)	3.182*** (0.28)
R2	0.392	0.442	0.435
N	394	394	394

Notes: Values in parentheses are standard errors. OLS regressions with state clustered standard errors; *significant at the 0.1 level, **significant at the 0.05 level, ***significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 3: Electoral milieu hypothesis (H2): Estimates for AfD vote share in the federal elections of 2013

What do we then observe once we control for the previous history of a rightist vote? Whereas the coefficients of the other variables remain basically unchanged as compared to our preceding specifications in Table 2, the variable capturing a tradition of radical-right voting is strong and highly significant in all models, regardless of the level of deprivation in the district. A radical right vote share of 10 percent in 1999 translates into a vote share of 2.3 percent for the AfD in 2013. The surprisingly strong and positive relationship between the early and the contemporary PRR-vote that Table 3 demonstrates is visualized in Figure 3.

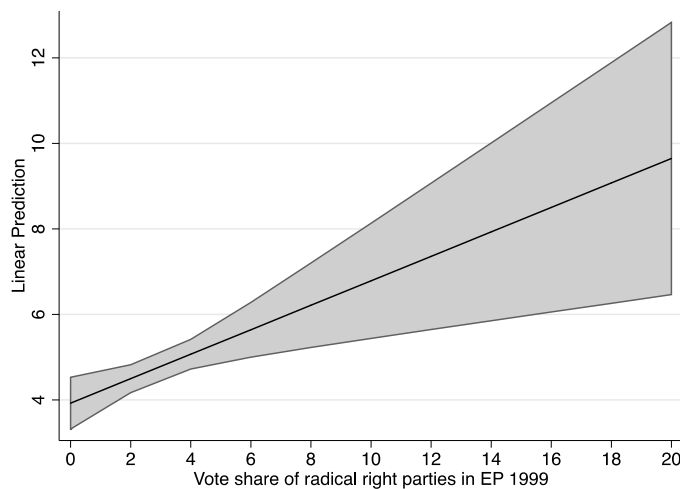


Figure 3: Visual representation of the relationship between the success of extreme right parties in the elections to the European Parliament in 1999 and the success of the AfD in the federal elections of 2013, based on M1 of Table 3

This effect is not limited to the elections in 1999. If we insert the vote share of extreme right parties in other EP elections as the one in 1999, the relationship remains positive (results not shown). We take this as evidence in support of our second hypothesis: Apparently, certain electoral milieus without distinct socio-economic group characteristics were in the past and are still today particularly responsive to the ideological stance of a populist radical-right party, although economic deprivation and a tradition of radical right voting reinforce each other (see Appendix D). Importantly, this holds for Eastern and Western Germany as separate analyses show.

Hence, our findings reject the first, political economy, hypothesis, but support our second hypothesis about a tradition of extreme right voting in certain districts in which the AfD prospers today.⁴

When we now ask where these specific AfD-friendly milieus are to be found, one quite common position in German public debate points to differences in political socialization between East and West, to differences in party identification, and to the degree to which the initially Western party system became established in the East and turned into a nation-wide unified party system. This seems to correspond to differences in values and political attitudes between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ states going beyond differences in the socio-economic conditions of the two regions. We therefore test hypothesis 3 whether we find empirically any substantial differences in AfD-support between Germany’s East and West. In a simple OLS framework this seems to be confirmed (see Tables 2 and 3 above). The dummy for the Eastern states remains significant throughout all specifications. The AfD enjoys stronger support in the East – independent from the higher degree of economic deprivation in the new German states.

This regional impact might be visualized in a graph that plots distance from the former Inner-German boarder on the x-axis with average support for the AfD in a district on the y-axis. We measure distance in a simple way by counting from 1 upwards to the East and from 0

⁴ Our findings at the macro-level echo recent findings based on individual level data. Based on evidence of a panel study on AfD voters, Goerres et al. (2017) find that political attitudes associated with support for the populist right, that is attitudes on immigration, dissatisfaction with the political system as well as socialization effects drove support for the AfD more strongly than socio-economic factors in 2015 and 2016.

downwards for the Western states, starting with those districts that before 1990 had laid directly at both sides of the former wall. If political socialization in the East is the ‘treatment’ that led to different political attitudes which then result in different vote choice, one should be able to observe an upward jump in AfD-support if one moves from the most eastern district in the West to the most western district in the East. And that is what we indeed observe (see Figure 4).

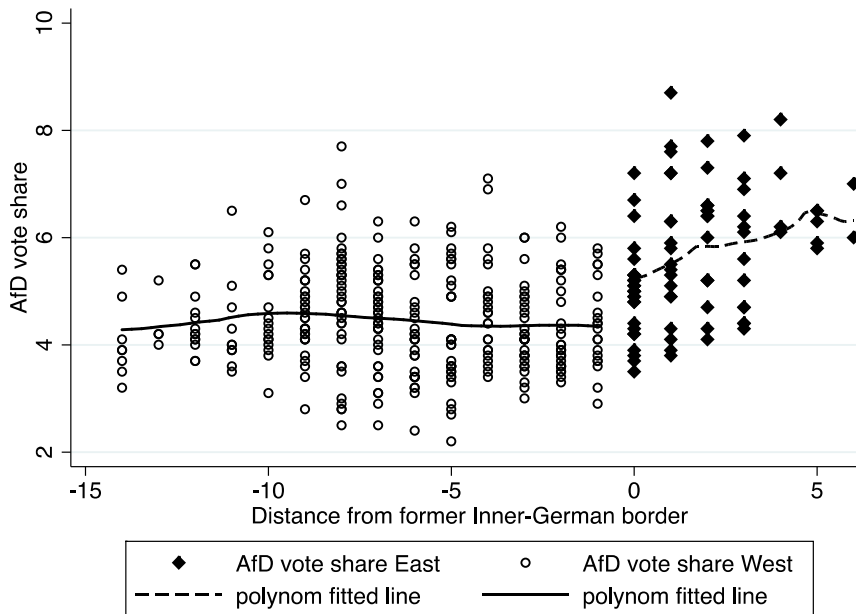


Figure 4: Geographical distribution of AfD vote share in the federal elections of 2013, conditional upon distance from the former Inner-German boarder

Yet, the East/West-divide is not the only interesting geographical pattern. Our depiction of the regional distribution of the AfD’s success in the federal election in 2013 showed considerable variation of support for the populist-right *within* Eastern and Western Germany (see Figure 2). The electoral milieus that are responsive to the ideological offer of the AfD are located in the prosperous south of both Eastern and Western Germany, i.e. in Baden-Wurttemberg and Bavaria on the one hand, and Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt, on the other. Studying the success of the AfD from a mere East-West perspective, therefore, risks overseeing the substantial within-variation. A recent study on the political culture of Germany highlights the existence of several distinct regional political cultures in Germany characterized by different values and attitudes towards constitutional democracy (Mannewitz, 2015). These regional political cultures, comprising between one and four states, cut across the East-West divide and reveal substantial variation within Western and even more so within Eastern Germany. Differences in political culture, which Mannewitz (2015) relates to differences in religious traditions, the

amount of social capital and the historic experience with socialist revolutions, might be relevant for the success of the AfD as populist parties conjure resentments and mistrust against the ruling political elite.

Exploring these differences systematically goes beyond the scope of this paper but remains for future research on the subject. We would like, however, to end our paper by illustrating the relevance of sub-regional differences in values and attitudes that have been identified as relevant for right-wing populism, namely attitudes towards immigrants (Arzheimer, 2009; Lubbers et al., 2002; Oesch, 2008; Kriesi et al., 2008). Based on data from the 2014 ALLBUS wave, Figure 5 shows the estimates of state dummies on attitudes on immigrants (score of factor analysis, see Appendix E) and trust in the government, controlling for compositional effects that is controlling for gender, age, education and occupation of the respondents and the average state level of deprivation.

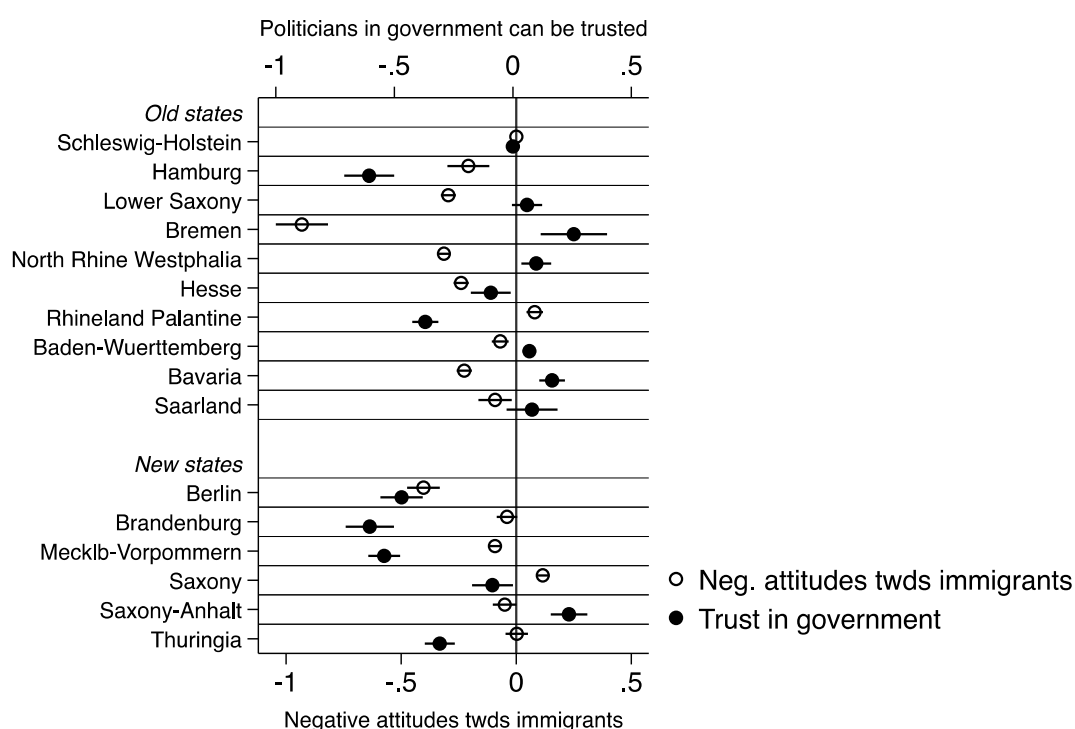


Figure 5: sub-regional variance in attitudes towards immigrants and trust in government, source: ALLBUS 2014

The figure reveals substantial variation in attitudes towards immigrants and trust in government both within and across Eastern and Western Germany. Attitudes towards immigrants are particularly negative in the South of West Germany (Rhineland Palatine and Baden-Wuerttemberg) and East Germany (Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia) while trust in the government is considerably lower in Hamburg, Rhineland Palatine and Berlin,

Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Thuringia. To what extent such differences in values and attitudes explain the varying success of the AfD is subject for further research which might in particular explore cultural differences at lower geographical or historical units than states which comprise rather heterogeneous regional units themselves.

Conclusions

Right-wing populism is on the rise. Everywhere? Until recently, the resilience of the German party system to such a right-wing populist party has been an exception to this general trend, often explained with the specific German past, the strategies of the mainstream parties or the internal division within the radical right in Germany (Bornschiefer, 2012). The creation and subsequent establishment of the right-wing populist *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in the German party system since the Eurozone crisis in 2012 put an end to this German *exceptionalism*. In this paper, we examine the plausibility of one of the most dominant explanations for right-wing populist voting to account for the success of the AfD, namely the ‘losers of modernization’-thesis, for the federal elections in 2013 and the EP-elections in 2014. Based on district level data from the *Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development* (Raumforschung, 2016) and official data on electoral outcomes at the district level, we examine whether the socio-economic characteristics of a district yield any explanatory power for the AfD’s electoral success. Our findings suggest that the modernization thesis bears little relevance for the success of the populist right in Germany. By contrast, we find a strong correlation between the success of the AfD in 2013 and 2014 and the success of radical right parties in previous elections. We explain this intriguing finding with a “tradition of radical right ideas” on which the AfD has been able to draw once the broader political and social context allowed for the creation of a right-wing populist party in Germany.

This has at least one major implication for the question whether the electoral success of the Populist Radical Right should be seen as a temporary phenomenon or whether it will last. Our finding that the support for the AfD is rather independent from economic factors and particularly strong now at a moment in which the German economy is doing extremely well, suggests that this new party is going to stay and to become a stable element in the party system. It will also not do to simply address economic grievances, when the main conflict line is of socio-cultural character.

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Hesse: Landesamt (2014)

Mecklenburg-West-Pomerania: Vorpommern (2014)

Lower Saxony: Niedersachsen (2015)

North Rhine Westphalia
<https://webshop.it.nrw.de/details.php?id=18706>

Rhineland-Palatine:
<http://www.wahlen.rlp.de/btw/wahlen/2013/landkreise/index.html>

Saarland: Saarland (2017)

Saxony: Sachsen (2013)

Saxony-Anhalt: (Sachsen-Anhalt, 2014)

Schleswig-Holstein: <http://wahlen-sh.de/wahlen.php?site=left/gebiete&wahl=152#index.php?site=right/ergebnis&wahl=152&gebiet=1&typ=1&stimme=2>

Thuringia: Thüringen (2014)

Appendix:

Appendix A: Factor analysis for deprivation index

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Uniqueness
Unemployment	0.945	-0.038	0.258	-0.044	0.037
Young unemployed	0.872	-0.237	0.259	-0.096	0.107
Old unemployed	0.866	-0.112	0.374	0.059	0.094
Long-term unemployed	0.809	0.134	-0.128	0.154	0.288
Under employment	0.935	0.041	0.295	-0.053	0.035
Mini-jobbers	-0.202	0.802	0.001	-0.267	0.245
Av. Household income	-0.593	0.326	-0.234	0.340	0.372
Size of households ²	-0.618	-0.326	-0.361	-0.228	0.330
Share of foreigners	-0.128	0.805	-0.014	0.317	0.235
Poverty in old age	0.263	0.891	0.007	-0.064	0.133
Children in poverty	0.926	0.210	0.220	-0.066	0.045
Age of entry into retirement	-0.349	0.108	-0.362	0.512	0.474
Dependency on ALG II	0.946	0.143	0.212	-0.043	0.039
Average level of ALG II	0.944	0.129	0.229	-0.041	0.038
Long-term labor market support	0.240	0.179	0.886	-0.034	0.124
Short term labor market support	0.435	-0.058	0.868	-0.009	0.055
Single parents on benefits	-0.848	-0.004	0.081	-0.214	0.230
Young single parents on benefits	-0.642	-0.095	0.120	-0.529	0.285
Life expectancy at 65 years	-0.563	0.164	-0.032	0.590	0.307
Private insolvency procedures	0.640	0.298	0.014	-0.412	0.332
Level of old age pensions	0.600	-0.180	0.169	0.598	0.221
Birth by teenage moms	0.763	-0.085	0.378	-0.173	0.238
Distance to next hospital	-0.223	-0.776	-0.189	-0.118	0.298

Table A.1: Factor loadings of the factor analysis for economic and social deprivation index, source: Inkar 2017

	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor 1	10.65	7.37	0.463	0.463
Factor 2	3.28	0.68	0.143	0.606
Factor 3	2.60	0.71	0.113	0.719
Factor4	1.90		0.083	0.802

Table A.2: Eigenvalues of the factor analysis for economic and social deprivation index

Appendix B: Analysis with AfD vote share in elections to the EP in 2014

	M1	M2
Deprivation index	-0.006** (0.00)	-0.007*** (0.00)
Eastern Germany	0.027*** (0.01)	0.021** (0.01)
Urban district	-0.002 (0.00)	-0.002 (0.00)
Share of Foreigners	0.002*** (0.00)	0.002*** (0.00)
Eastern Germany * Deprivation		0.006 (0.01)
Constant	0.055*** (0.00)	0.055*** (0.00)
R2	0.216	0.223
N	402	402

Notes: Values in parentheses are standard errors. OLS regressions with state clustered standard errors; *significant at the 0.1 level, **significant at the 0.05 level, ***significant at the 0.01 level.

Table B.1: Modernization hypothesis: Estimates for AfD vote share to the EP in 2014 from OLS regressions

The effect of deprivation on the success of the AfD in the EP election of 2014 is not only pointing in the wrong direction but also highly unstable and vanishes once we include further control variables such as the level of social capital (results not shown) and most importantly, the strength of extreme right parties in previous elections.

	M1	M2	M3
Deprivation index	0.002 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.003 (0.00)
Eastern Germany	0.025*** (0.00)		0.025*** (0.00)
Urban district	-0.005 (0.00)	-0.007 (0.00)	-0.005 (0.00)
Share of Foreigners	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001*** (0.00)	0.001** (0.00)
Eastern Germany * Deprivation			
Share of radical right EP'94	0.345*** (0.07)		0.340*** (0.07)
Share of radical right EP'89		0.217*** (0.05)	
Share of radical right EP'99			0.042 (0.15)
Share of radical right EP '14			-0.070 (0.13)
Constant	0.040*** (0.00)	0.040*** (0.01)	0.040*** (0.00)
R2	0.485	0.453	0.486
N	344	325	344

Notes: Values in parentheses are standard errors. OLS regressions with state clustered standard errors; *significant at the 0.1 level, **significant at the 0.05 level, ***significant at the 0.01 level.

Table B.2: Electoral Milieu: Estimates for AfD vote share to the EP in 2014 from OLS regressions

Appendix C: Robustness tests

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
Eastern Germany	2.047*** (0.38)	2.063*** (0.41)	1.682*** (0.37)	1.856*** (0.41)	1.874*** (0.41)	1.875*** (0.41)	1.874*** (0.41)	1.875*** (0.41)
Urban district	-0.533** (0.21)	-0.516* (0.25)	-0.721*** (0.21)	-0.886*** (0.30)	-0.641*** (0.21)	-0.642*** (0.21)	-0.641*** (0.21)	-0.642*** (0.21)
Share of foreigners	0.104*** (0.02)	0.091*** (0.02)	0.117*** (0.02)	0.102*** (0.02)	0.107*** (0.02)	0.107*** (0.02)	0.107*** (0.02)	0.107*** (0.02)
Unemployment	-0.047 (0.04)							
Average household income		0.001** (0.00)						
State of public services			0.153 (0.09)					
Demographic structure				0.144 (0.11)				
Loss in young population (5 years)					-0.000 (0.00)			
Loss in young population (2 years)						-0.000 (0.00)		
Loss in population (5 years)							-0.000 (0.00)	
Loss in population (2 years)								-0.000 (0.00)
Constant	3.890*** (0.27)	2.201*** (0.59)	3.661*** (0.19)	3.791*** (0.25)	3.677*** (0.20)	3.678*** (0.20)	3.677*** (0.20)	3.678*** (0.20)
R2	0.317	0.332	0.320	0.316	0.311	0.312	0.311	0.312
N	402	402	402	402	402	402	402	402

Notes: Values in parentheses are standard errors. OLS regressions with state clustered standard errors; *significant at the 0.1 level, **significant at the 0.05 level, ***significant at the 0.01 level.

Table C.1: Alternative specifications of the modernization thesis I: Estimates for AfD vote share in the federal elections of 2013

	M9	M10	M11	M12	M13
Index of deprivation	0.286* (0.15)				
Index of deprivation^2	-0.084 (0.09)				
Urban district	-0.403 (0.27)	-0.634*** (0.21)	-0.636*** (0.21)	-0.635*** (0.21)	-0.636*** (0.21)
Share of foreigners	0.023 (0.05)	0.106*** (0.02)	0.106*** (0.02)	0.107*** (0.02)	0.106*** (0.02)
Eastern Germany		1.884*** (0.45)	1.871*** (0.44)	1.857*** (0.40)	1.877*** (0.41)
increase in unemployment (5 years)		0.003 (0.09)			
increase in unemployment (2 years)			-0.011 (0.17)		
Decrease in industrial employment (5 years)				-0.020 (0.02)	
Decrease in industrial employment (2 years)					-0.004 (0.02)
Constant	4.703*** (0.44)	3.692*** (0.21)	3.688*** (0.21)	3.718*** (0.21)	3.693*** (0.20)
R2	0.057	0.311	0.311	0.312	0.311
N	402	402	402	402	402

Notes: Values in parentheses are standard errors. OLS regressions with state clustered standard errors; *significant at the 0.1 level, **significant at the 0.05 level, ***significant at the 0.01 level.

Table C.2: Alternative specifications of the modernization thesis II: Estimates for AfD vote share in the federal elections of 2013

Appendix D: Interaction between economic deprivation and tradition of radical right voting

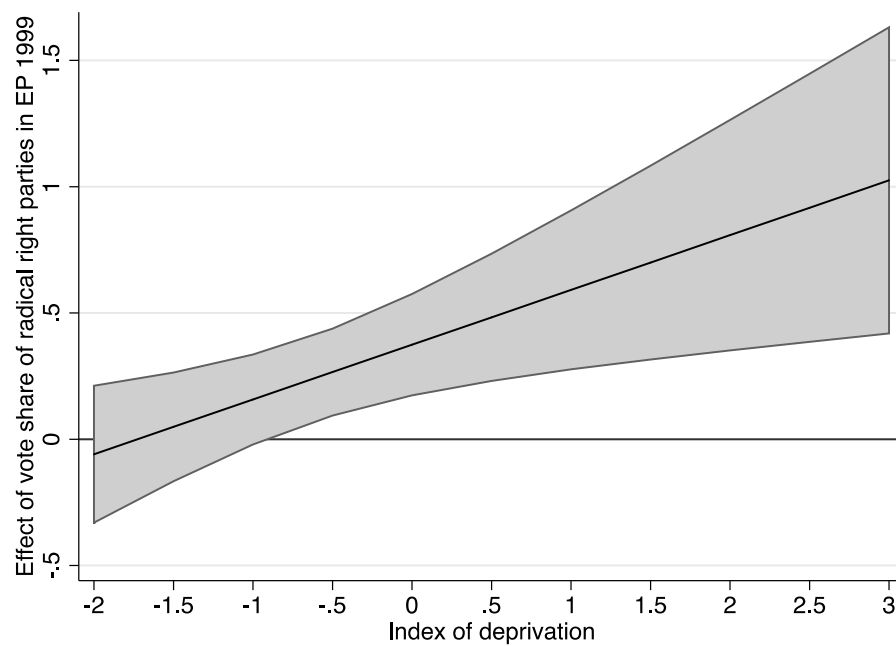


Figure D.1: Effect of vote share of radical right party in the election to the European parliament in 1999 on the AfD vote share in 2013, depending on deprivation

Appendix E: Factor analysis for attitudes towards immigrants

Factor	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor1	3.28808	2.37406	0.4697	0.4697
Factor2	0.91402	0.14083	0.1306	0.6003
Factor3	0.77320	0.19130	0.1105	0.7108
Factor4	0.58190	0.03172	0.0831	0.7939
Factor5	0.55017	0.08537	0.0786	0.8725
Factor6	0.46481	0.03698	0.0664	0.9389
Factor7	0.42782		0.0611	1.0000

Variable	Factor1	Uniqueness
No integration without assimilation	0.6362	0.5953
No state help for minorities	0.5975	0.6430
Immigrants should assimilate	0.6384	0.5925
Immigrants increase crime rate	0.7390	0.4539
Immigrants good for German economy	0.6434	0.5860
immigrants steal jobs	0.7289	0.4687
We should reduce number of immigrants	0.7920	0.3727

Source: Allbus 2014, variables: V680-V685, V691